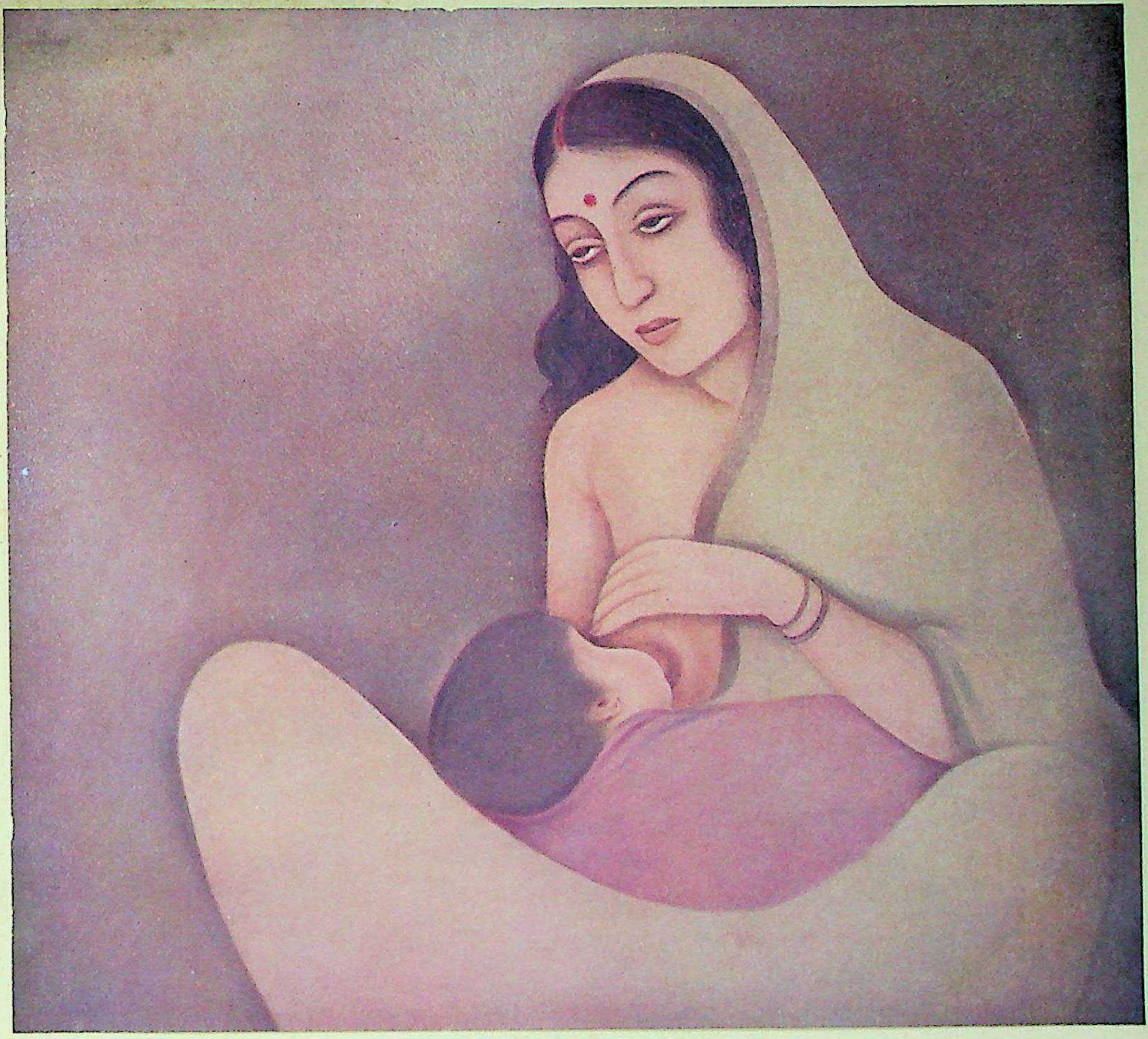


Art of
BISWANATH MUKERJI

759.954

A-1
121
Museum Library, Lucknow

Art of
BISWANATH MUKERJI

13 COLOURED & 9 BLACK & WHITE PLATES

FOREWORD BY

Prof. BIRESHWAR SEN
M.A.

INTRODUCTION BY

KRISHNA CHAITANYA

DHOOMI MAL DHARAM DAS
NEW DELHI
1952

Rs. 15.00

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Artist is grateful to his artist-friend Shri D. Badri, who took the initiative in bringing out this publication, and M/s. Dhoomi Mal Dharam Das, New Delhi, without whose cooperation and interest the publication would not have been possible.

The Artist also desires to express his thanks to Shri M. N. Kapur, Principal, Modern School, New Delhi, His Excellency Mr. Jossip Gjarja, formerly Yugoslav Ambassador in India, Shri S. K. Das, Head Master, Kala-niketan, Jabalpur, Shri K. K. Nair, Information Officer, Government of India and Shri A. C. Dutta of Calcutta, for lending paintings from their collections.

759.954

IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

New Delhi
20th April, 1952.

Biswanath Mukerji

LIST OF PLATES.

1. Mother and Child .... In the collection of Sri A. C. Dutta, Calcutta.
2. Peasant Woman and Child
3. Clouds over Western Ghats
4. The Two
5. Love Dale .... In the collection of Sri M. N. Kapur, Principal, Modern School, New Delhi.
6. The Artist .... In the collection of H. E. Mr. Jossip Gjarja, Former Yugoslav Ambassador in India.
7. Sita's Fire Ordeal .... In the collection of Sri S. K. Das, Head Master, Kalaniketan, Jabalpur.
8. Girl Reading .... In the collection of H. E. Mr. Jossip Gjarja, Former Yugoslav Ambassador in India.
9. The Boat Race
10. Youth and Age
11. Lights and Shadows .... In the collection of Sri K. K Nair, Information Officer, Govt. of India.
12. At Work .... In the collection of Dr. G. J. H. Maud, I. M. S., England.
13. Devotees
14. Head of a Girl .... In private collection, U. S. A.
15. Homewards .... In the Art Gallery, Kalaniketan, Jabalpur.
16. Refugee Tents
17. Jai Bajrang! (Call of the Wrestlers)
18. Away from the town
19. Pensive .... In the Art Gallery, Kalaniketan, Jabalpur.
20. Village Scene
21. Blue God
22. The Departure

FOREWORD

Like the rippling waters of mountain stream dancing round a granite rock, a procession of pupils pass by the stationery teacher, out into the uncertain world of futurity. Of the many that come, a few make good; fewer still carry the torch of joyous idealism lit by their teacher with lustre undimmed.

It makes my heart glad to see that Biswanath Mukerji is forging ahead in the world of art, not by hitching his waggon to the ephemeral star of moment in the artistic firmament, as many do in these days, but by good, solid and conscientious work. I hope his versatility will come to a richer fruition as the years go by and receive public recognition which it so eminently deserves.

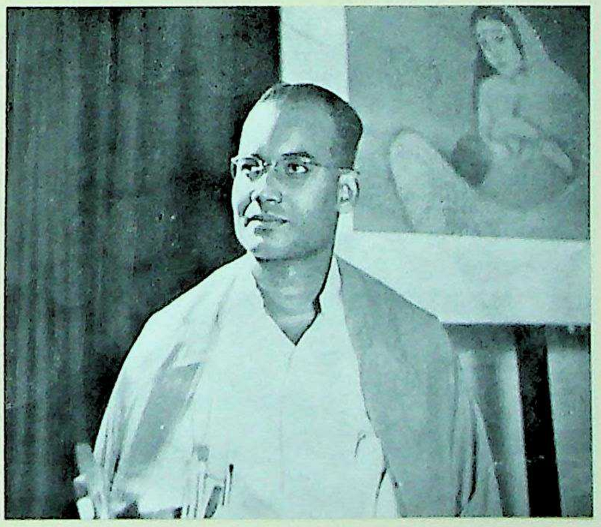
BIRESHWAR SEN

Government School
of Arts and Crafts
LUCKNOW.
10th April 1952

राजकीय संग्रहालय पुस्तकालय, लखनऊ
A-I
121
पुस्तक संख्या
State Museum Library, Lucknow

ART OF BISWANATH MUKERJI

A Heraclitean flux is the most striking feature of Indian art to-day.



We do not dip in the same river twice, that philosopher had said, and those who dive in the stream of Indian art to-day bring up myriad marvels, each unlike the other, when they surface. In this world of transition, tradition has dissolved on the surface, but lives in innumerable concealed prolongations. Dissolving cultural frontiers have brought strange merchandise from afar in which our men are learning to traffic with increasing aptitude. With so many legacies, the young artist is like an adolescent who has inherited more wealth than is good for him. The unconscious prompting towards imitation is his chiefest peril.

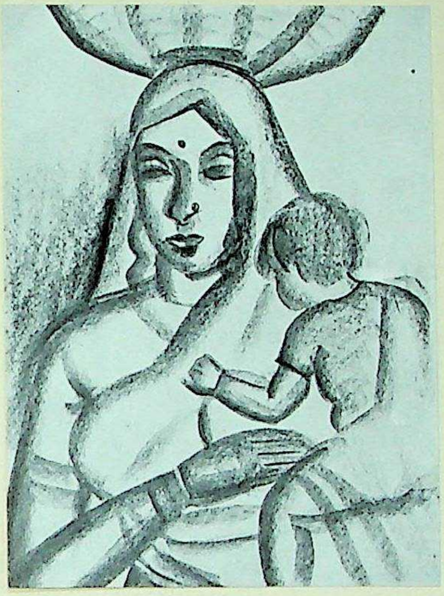
That imitation is bad is a truth which has only been partially understood. For, while the traditionalists excommunicate people who imitate Western styles, sophisticated criticism overlooks the fact that imitating Quartier Latin is not raising the standard of revolt but erecting a new orthodoxy and a still-born orthodoxy at that. But if imitation of any tradition, however hieratically holy or rakishly radical, is bad, assimilation from any tradition is good. Several Indian artists have realised this truth and among them is Biswanath Mukerji.

Thirty-two year-old Mukerji hails from Banaras and is the brother of S. P. Mukerji who has dedicated his life to the decoration of a Shiva Mandir with murals and ivory miniatures illustrating episodes from the Shiva Puran. The brother, who realised that an art career and subsistence wages had nothing to do with each other in India, discouraged the artistic talents of Biswanath. The infatuation with the Muse, however, was very strong in the adolescent Biswanath and he ran away from home with the modest capital of eleven rupees. From 1939 to 1945, he was in the Government School of Arts, Lucknow, studying under Asit Haldar, L. M. Sen, H. Roy Chowdhury and Bireswar Sen. He built up a rather unique record by standing first in almost all the subjects in all the examinations held during the years he was at the School. Since 1945, he has been working as Senior Art Teacher in the Modern School, New Delhi.

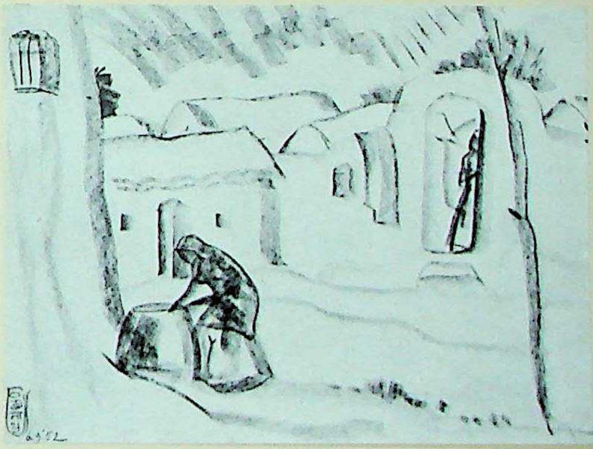
Mukerji's works have been accepted at numerous exhibitions in India and foreign capitals like Kabul, Tokyo, Paris, London, Cairo, Istanbul, Ankara and Baghdad. He has so far won about 26 awards for brush drawings, commercial work, paintings in the Indian and Western styles, in all media-water colour, tempera and oils. The Kala Niketan, Jabalpur, has built up a gallery of over twenty of his works. In 1951, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London.

A few wash paintings by Mukerji have been included in this compilation to indicate his early link with the revivalist manner. In *Sita's Fire Ordeal* the revivalist idiom is maintained at its original purity. In its own way the Renaissance manner was synthetic, though the synthesis was confined to Eastern elements, and this picture recalls Tibetan paintings. The depiction of the Fire God is reminiscent of the terrible Lokapalas of Tantric Buddhism. In fine contrast to this baroque effect is the lovely miniature of Sita. In *Homewards*, the mood changes over to extreme delicacy and soft colour harmonies. The aesthetic intention still remains pegged at the decorative level, but in *Mother and Child*, with its regression of form to archaic simplicity, its subdued, lovely colour and the infinite reverie on the face of the mother, the wash technique develops the capacity to be the vehicle of the purest and most delicate emotions.

While the revivalists turned to the aristocratic traditions of the past, the art of the Imperial Guptas, the pomp and circumstance of the Moghul court and the romance and chivalry of the Rajput principalities, there was another democratic tradition-folk art-which was brilliantly resurrected by Jamini Roy. The refreshing directness of appeal of folk art has attracted many Indian artists and a few of Mukerji's works under this inspiration have also been included in this volume. The intense appetite for colour which is an improtant trait of folk art can be seen in *Blue God*. In *Peasant Woman and Child*, the folk idiom receives a complex orchestration. The undulating flow of the drapery traces an elegant decorative pattern while the thick contour lines retain the vigour of folk art drawing. Though flat in treatment, the volumes manage to convey a suggestion of weight here, in the fat flesh of the child



and the massiveness of the hands of the mother. In *Devotees*, the folk idiom has received its greatest refinement. Folk art has got the courage to risk a high proportion of uniformly coloured surfaces. Handled without intuition, this type of attempt will end up in monotony, but when it succeeds, as it has succeeded in this painting, it distils a chaste decorative effect out of very simple ingredients.



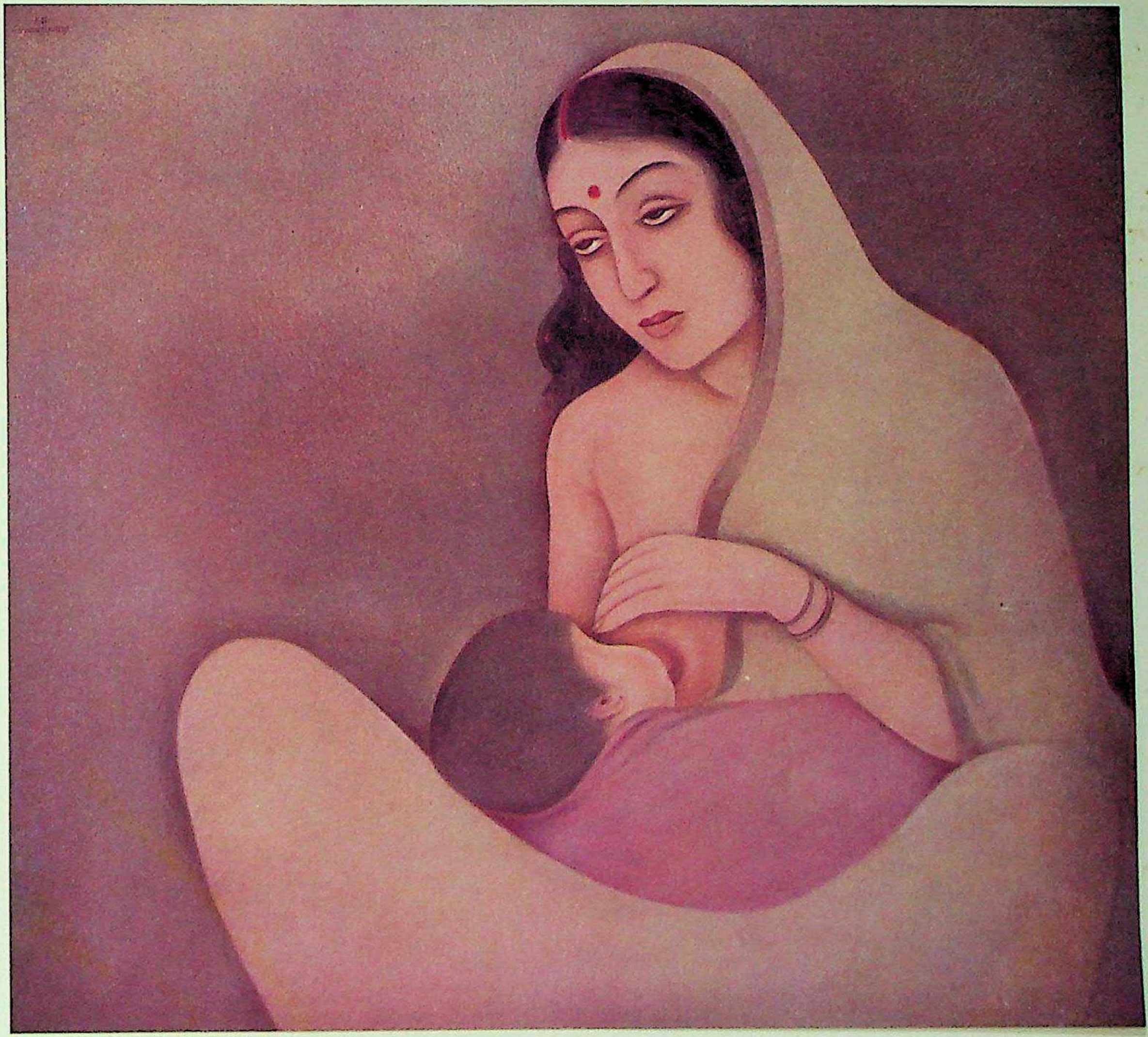
The essential mood of a natural scene distils over into Mukerji's landscapes with a fidelity of colour and form which is not aggressively realistic in its impact but tempered by the artist's refined deocrative intuition. Considerable technical ability is also latent in these works. The forceful rhythm of the jagged line of hills typical of the Western Ghats and their sparse vegetation have been ably caught in *Clouds Over the Ghats*. The placement of the red figure in *Away from the Town*, the deploying of the larger volumes in *Lovedale* and the play of light in *Lights and Shadows* show not only adequate mastery over technique but a spontaneity of expression which conserves as its nascent strength the lyrical feeling which the panorama of nature evokes. In *Youth and Age* the landscape becomes charged with human memories and if the piece is symbolical, it is a symbolism which does not spill over but is wholly contained by the pictorial treatment. The rhythm of human life which enters as a shadowy memory in this landscape has come to the forefront in many of Mukerji's pictures. He has contributed many genre studies of village life, fairs, busy centres of civic life like the market place or the theatre and an authentic humany characterises these studies. The *Village Scence* in tempera and the *Refugee Tents* in oil included in this volume belong to this category.

From his initial naturalism with its full blooded colour and from, Mukerji deviates in two directions. In sketches like *The Two, At Work* and *Girl Reading*, a fleeting impressionism is realised through succinct but eloquent brush work. Reticent in overt statement, this manner is complete in its evocative quality. This idiom has been effectively applied to landscape work in his Chinese ink studies from Jaipur. As in the landscapes influenced by Zen Buddhism, elimination heightens enormously the power of suggestion of the represented forms. A vast stretch of territory is taken on to the frame in one of the studies while the crisp edges of light of silhouetted volumes have been caught brilliantly in another.

A further evolution of this reticent but evocative manner takes Mukerji towards near-abstractionism. The *Artist* and *Pensive* belong to this category. In *Jai Bajrang*, an egg tempera which won the only prize awarded to India in the International Competition for paintings on sports organised during the Asian Games, 1951, abstraction combined with a massive organisation of volumes produces a composition of great impact. In *Boat Race*, abstraction combines with decorative intuition to create a panel filled with a sense of air and space.

A restless experimentalism in search of the rich humanistic experience which can come only from catholicity of mood and versatility of technique has characterised Mukerji's work so far. He has enough inner momentum to take him ever forward without succumbing to the temptation of pitching his tent at some wayside place and stagnating in the safe pursuit of imitation. But there are also perils of an opposite type. Versatility of technique and expression can become ends in itself. His healthy human bondage has saved Mukerji so far from this peril. If he continues to retain his self-criticism and watches his own steps he has ahead of him a great destiny.

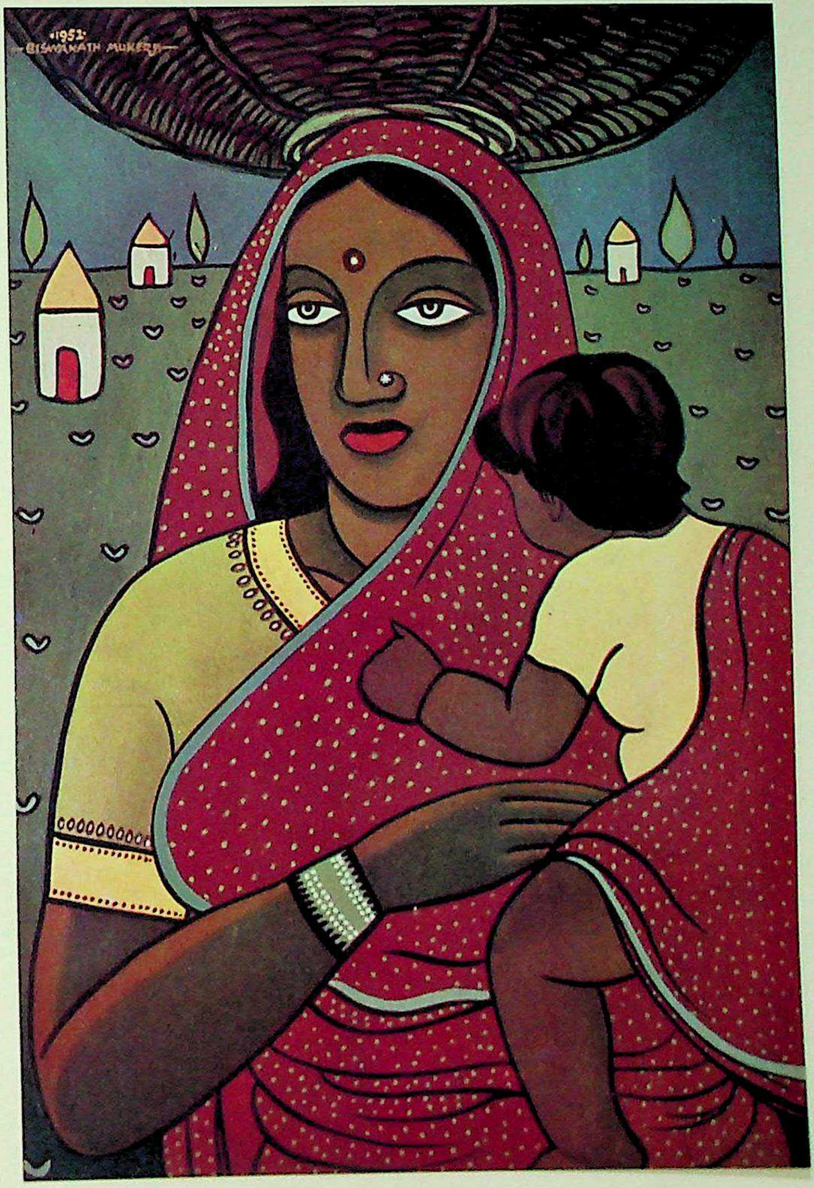
KRISHNA CHAITANYA.



Original Size 19½" × 21"

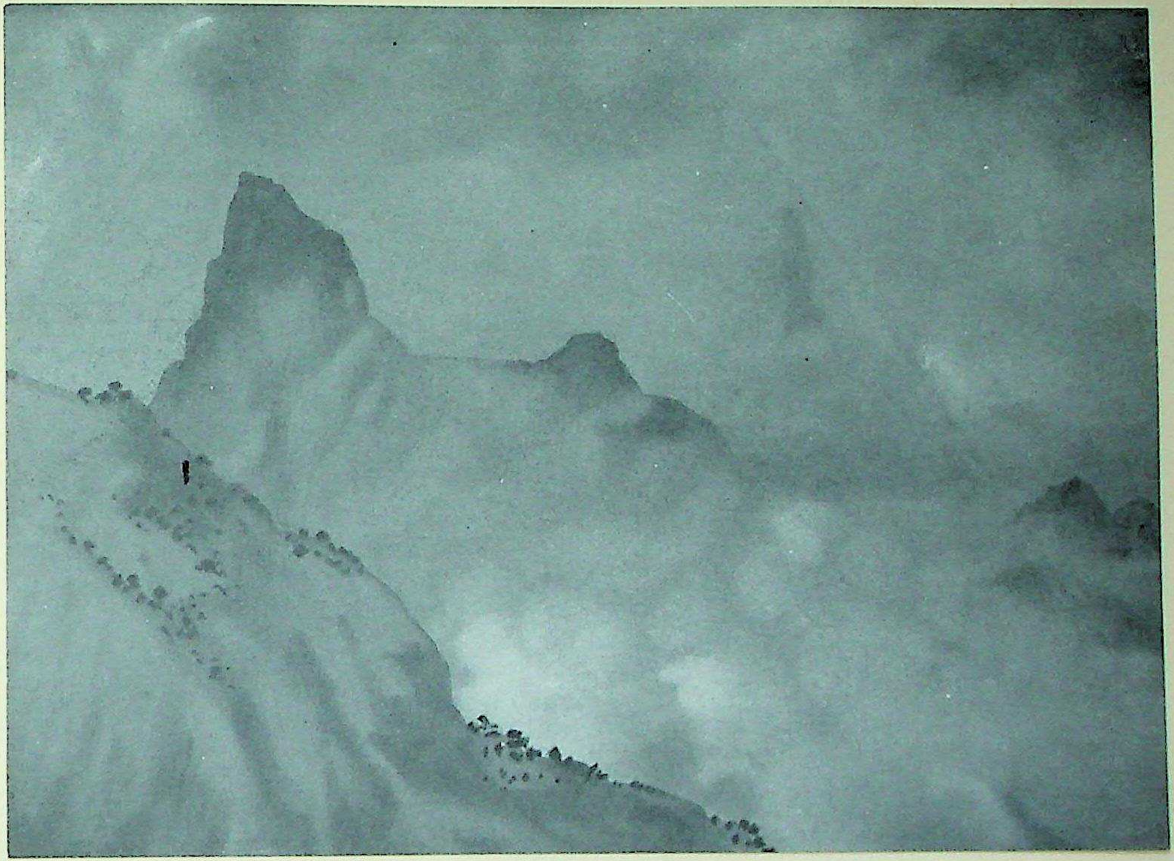
MOTHER AND CHILD.

PLATE 2


·1952·
BISWANATH MUKERJI

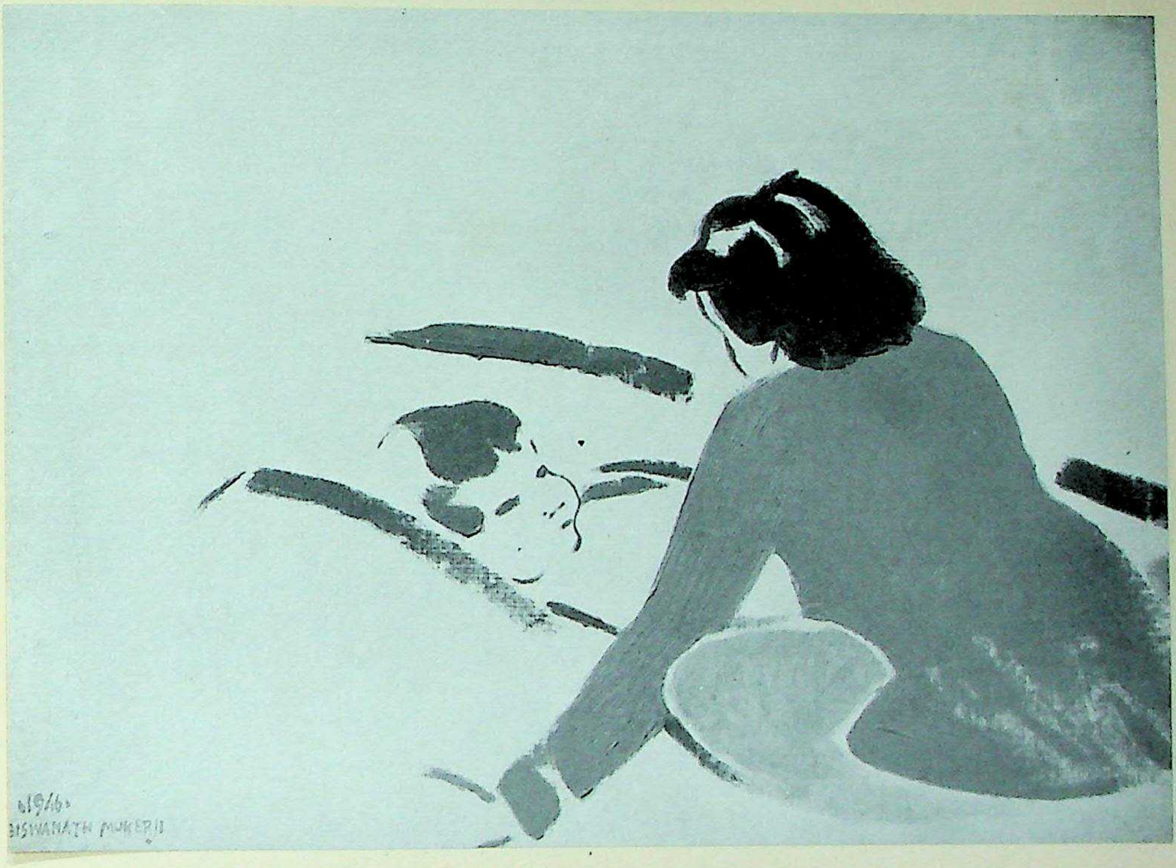
Original Size 16″ × 20″

PEASANT WOMAN AND CHILD.



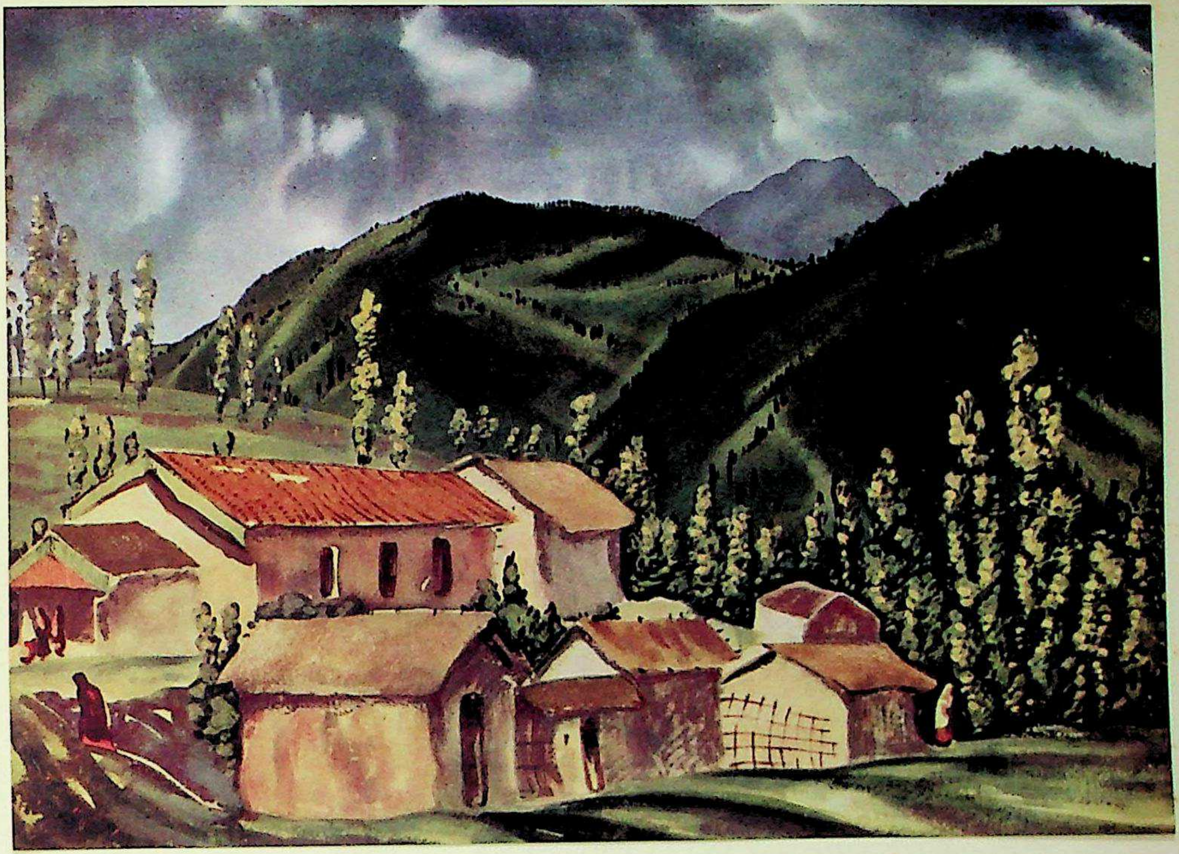
Original Size 15"×18"

CLOUDS OVER WESTERN GHATS.


1946
BISWANATH MUKERJI

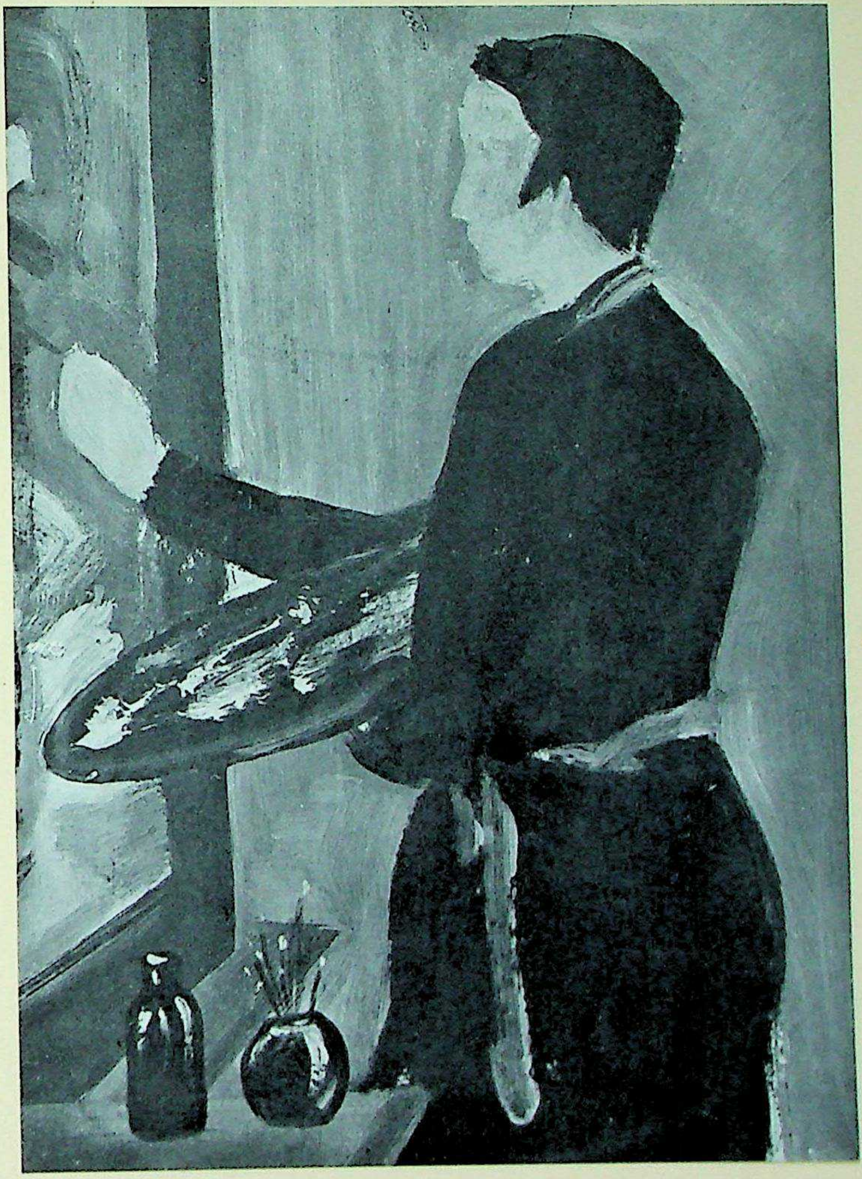
Original Size 9"×12"

THE TWO.



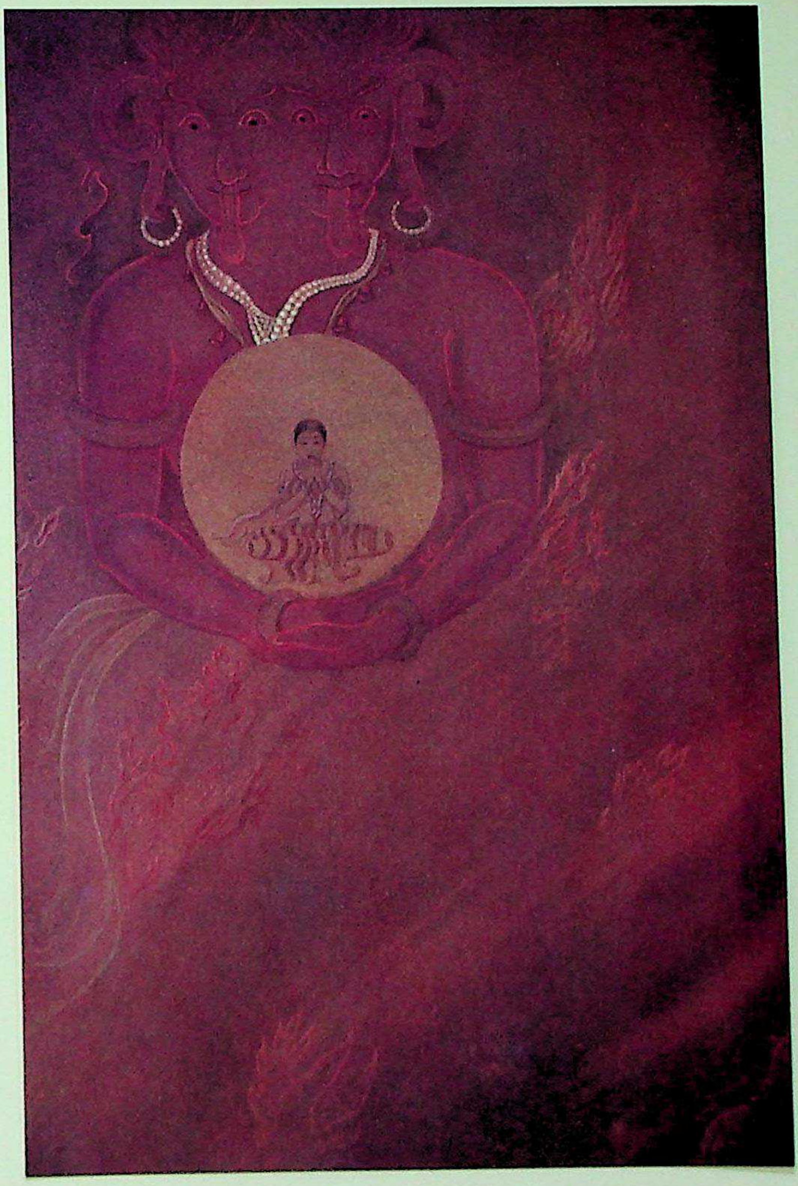
Original Size 21"×29"

LOVE DALE



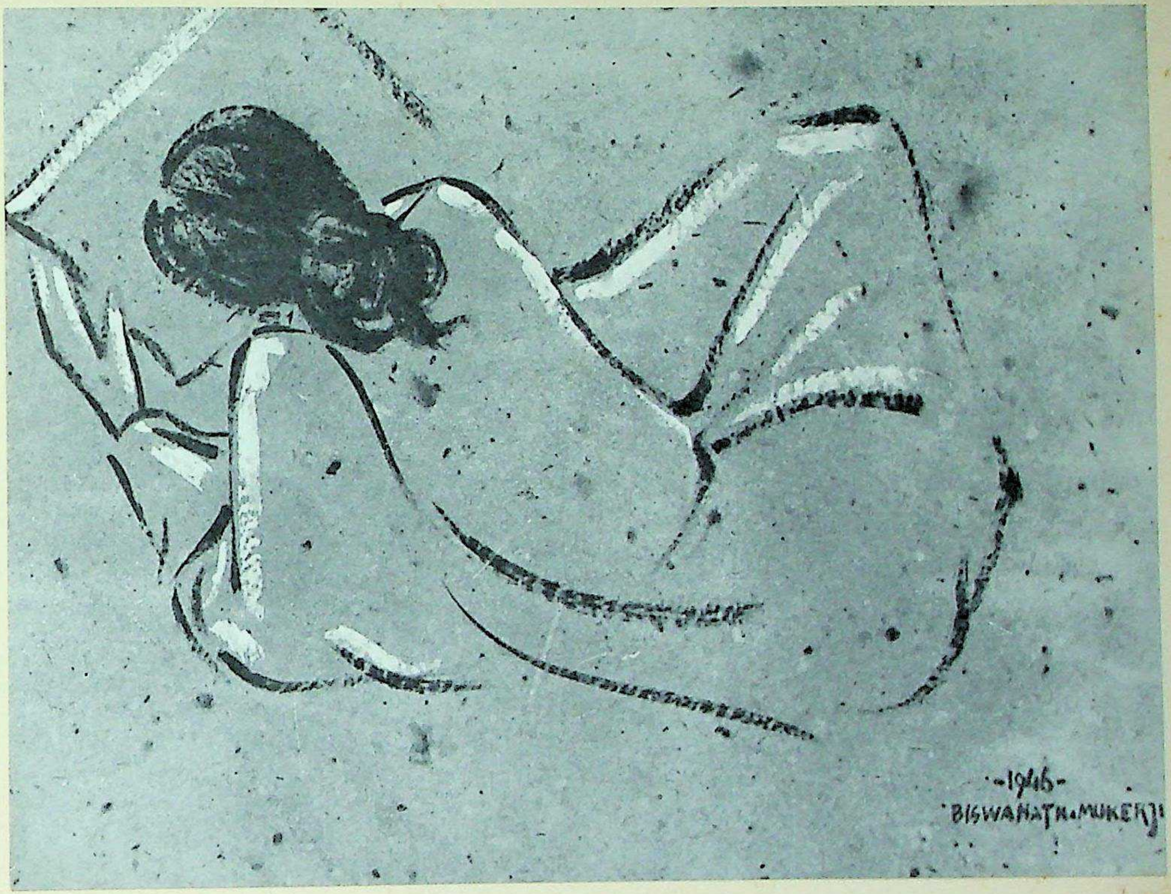
Actual Size

THE ARTIST



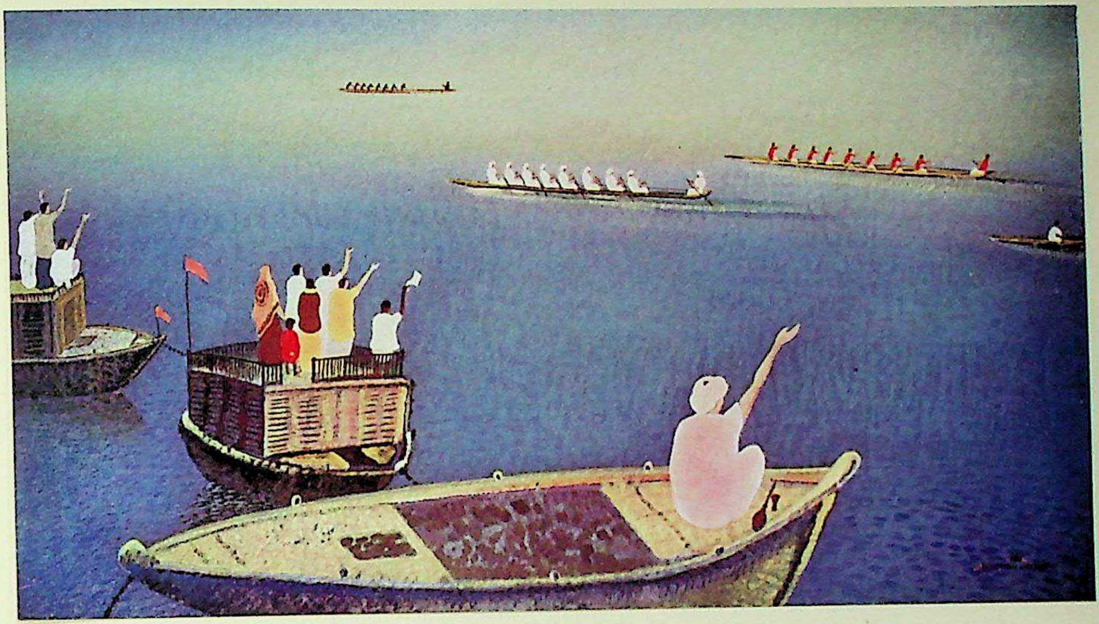
Original Size 20"×30"

SITA'S FIRE ORDEAL


-1946-
BISWANATH MUKERJI

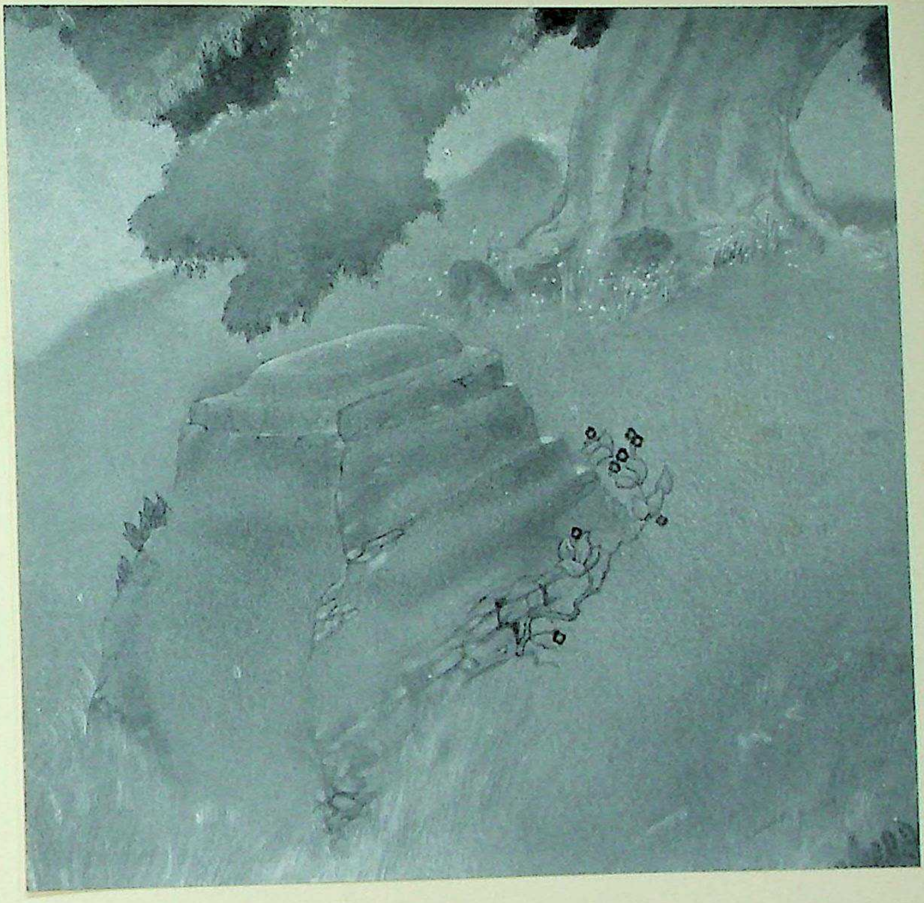
Actual Size

GIRL READING



THE BOAT RACE.

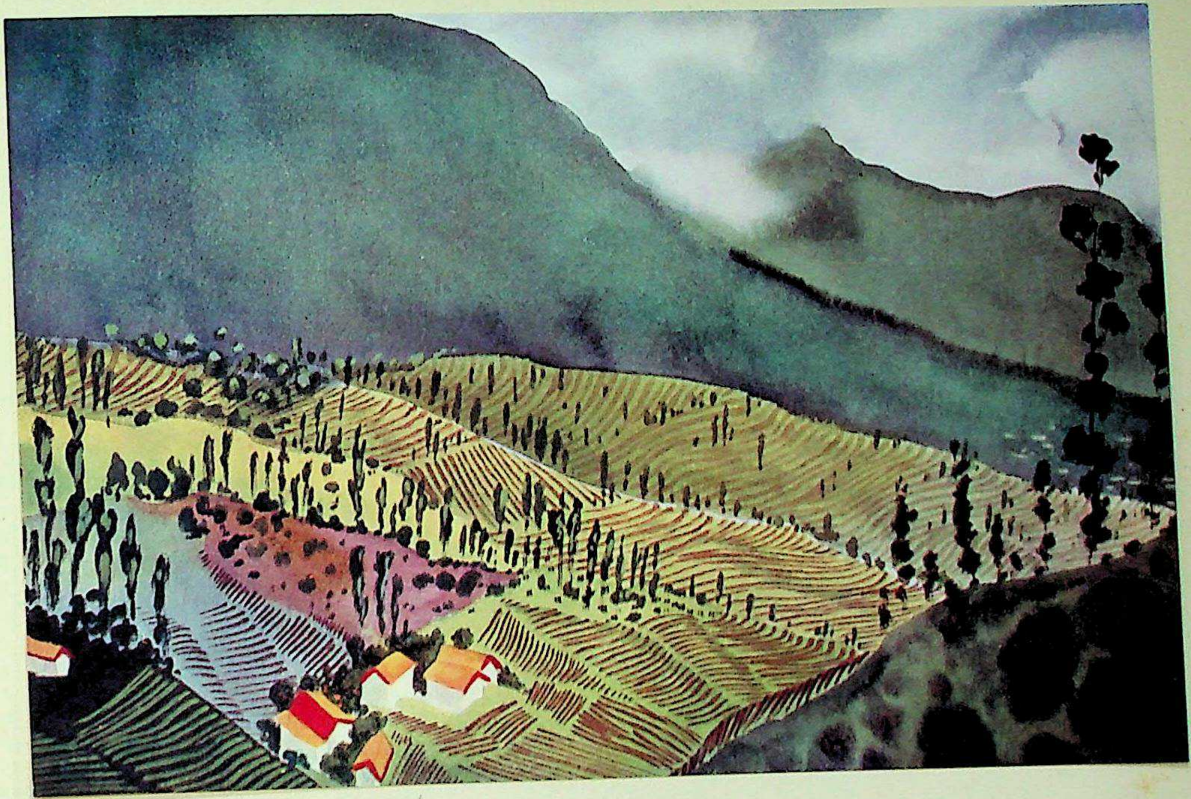
Original Size 18"×32"



Original Size 10"×11"

YOUTH AND AGE

State Museum, Lucknow.

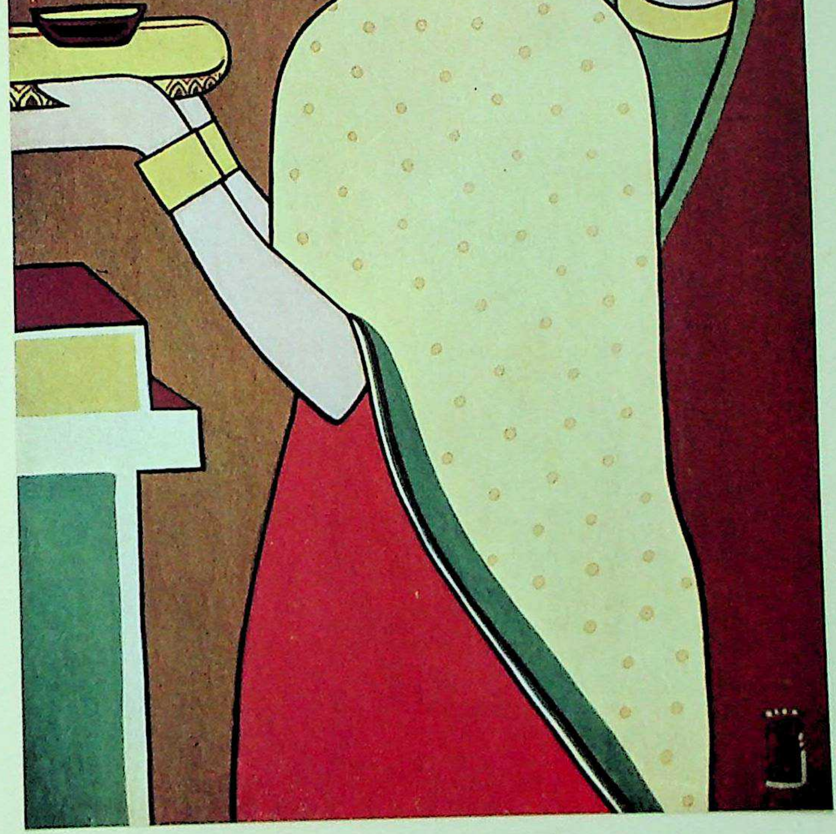


LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

Original Size 14"×19"

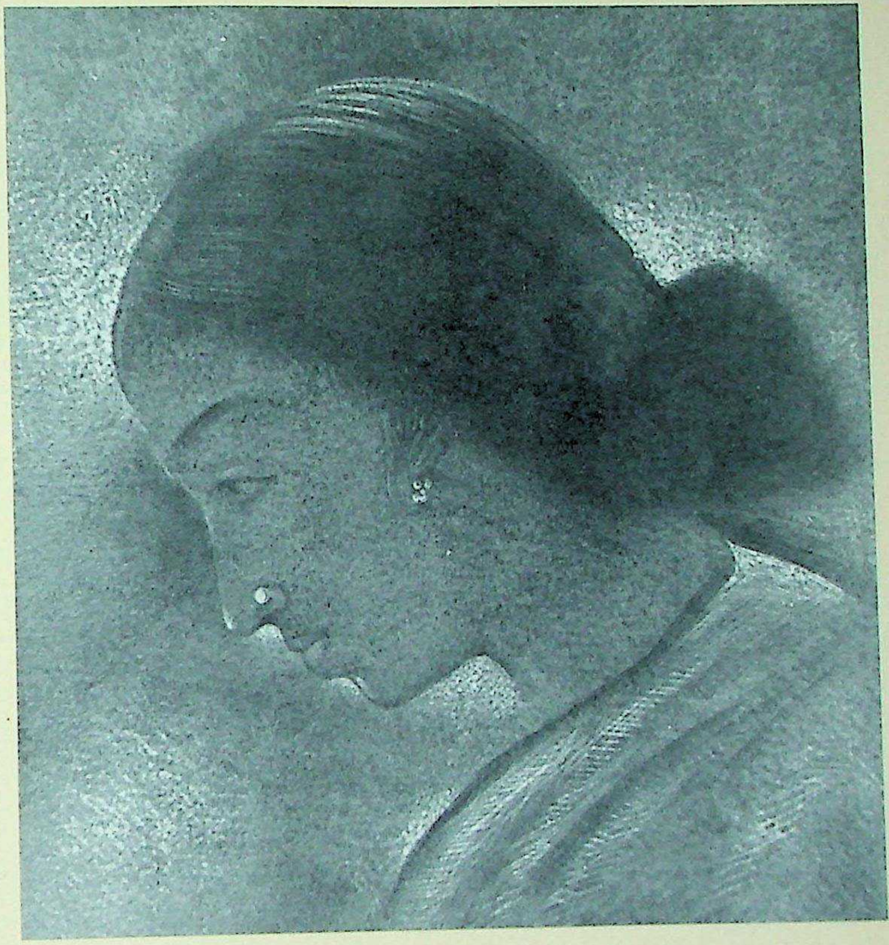
Original Size 10" × 13"

AT WORK



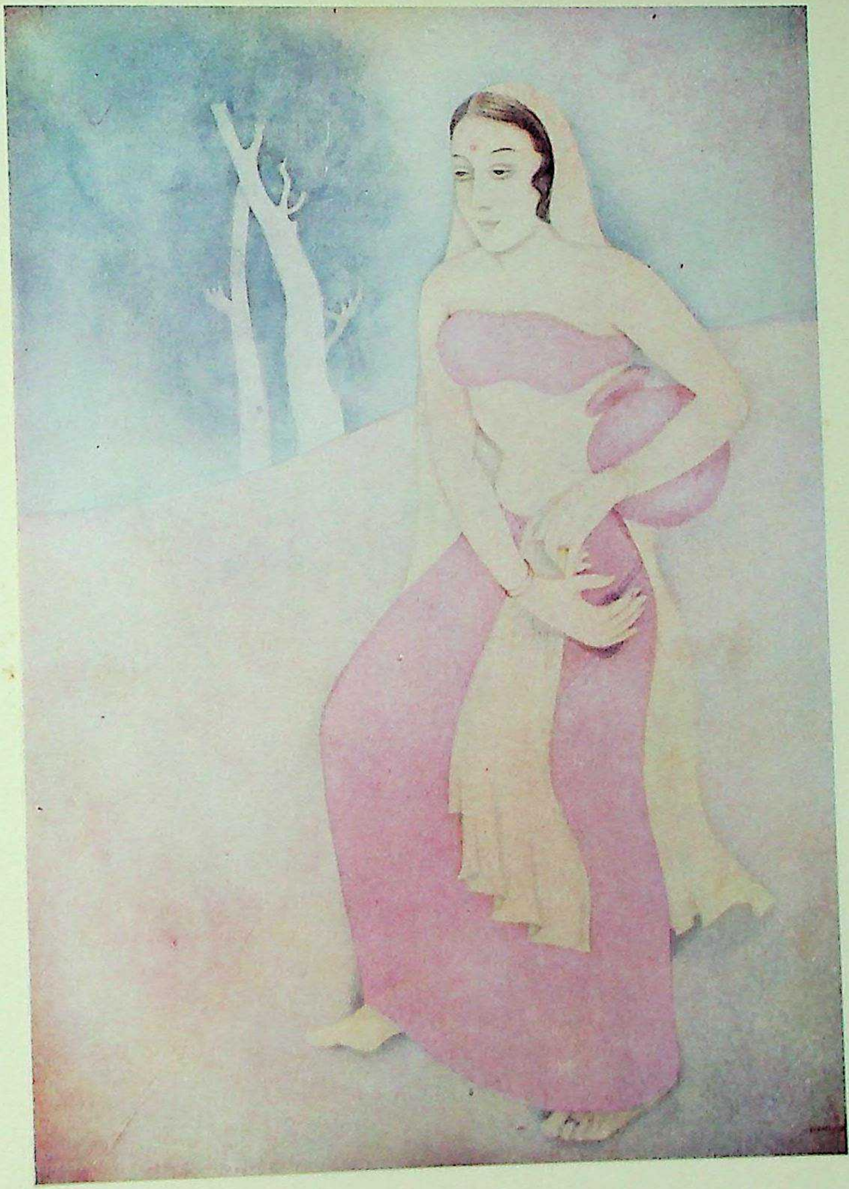
Original Size 21" × 30"

DEVOTEES



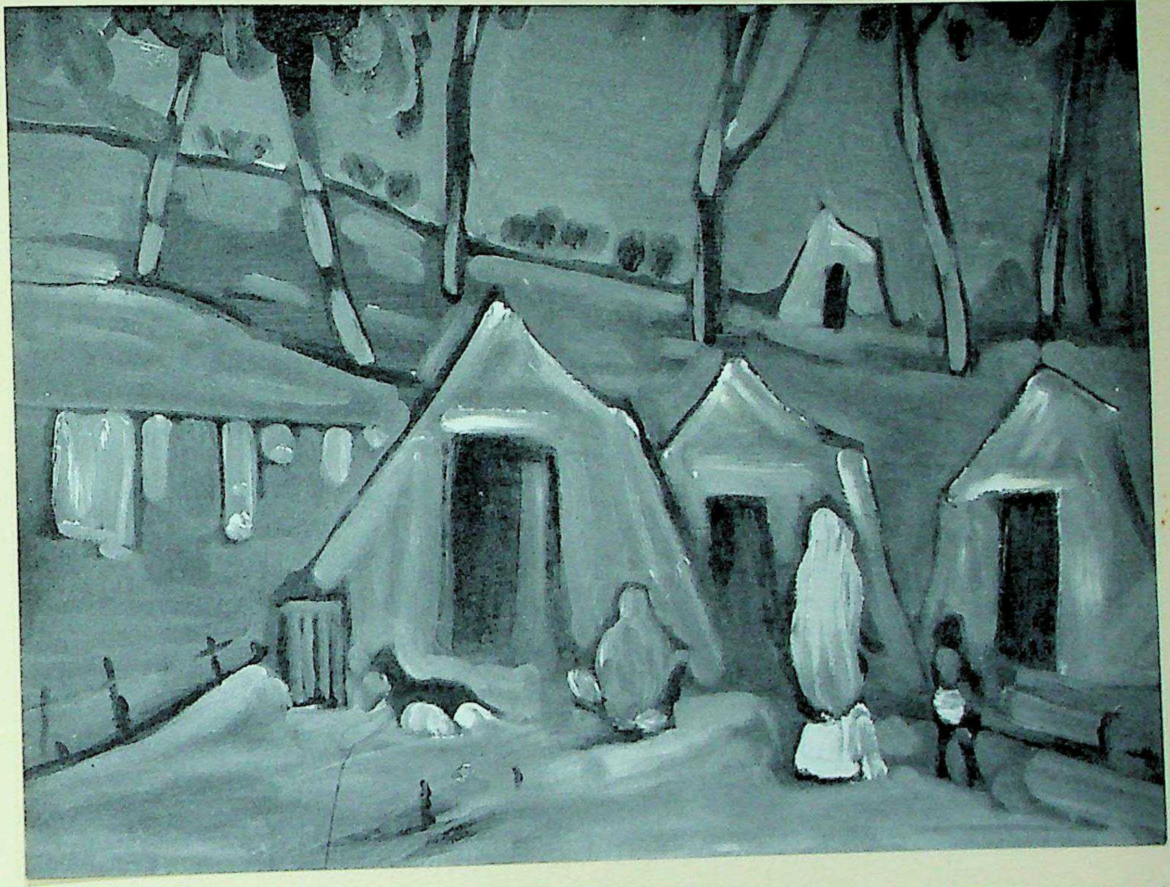
Original Size 12"×12"

HEAD OF A GIRL.



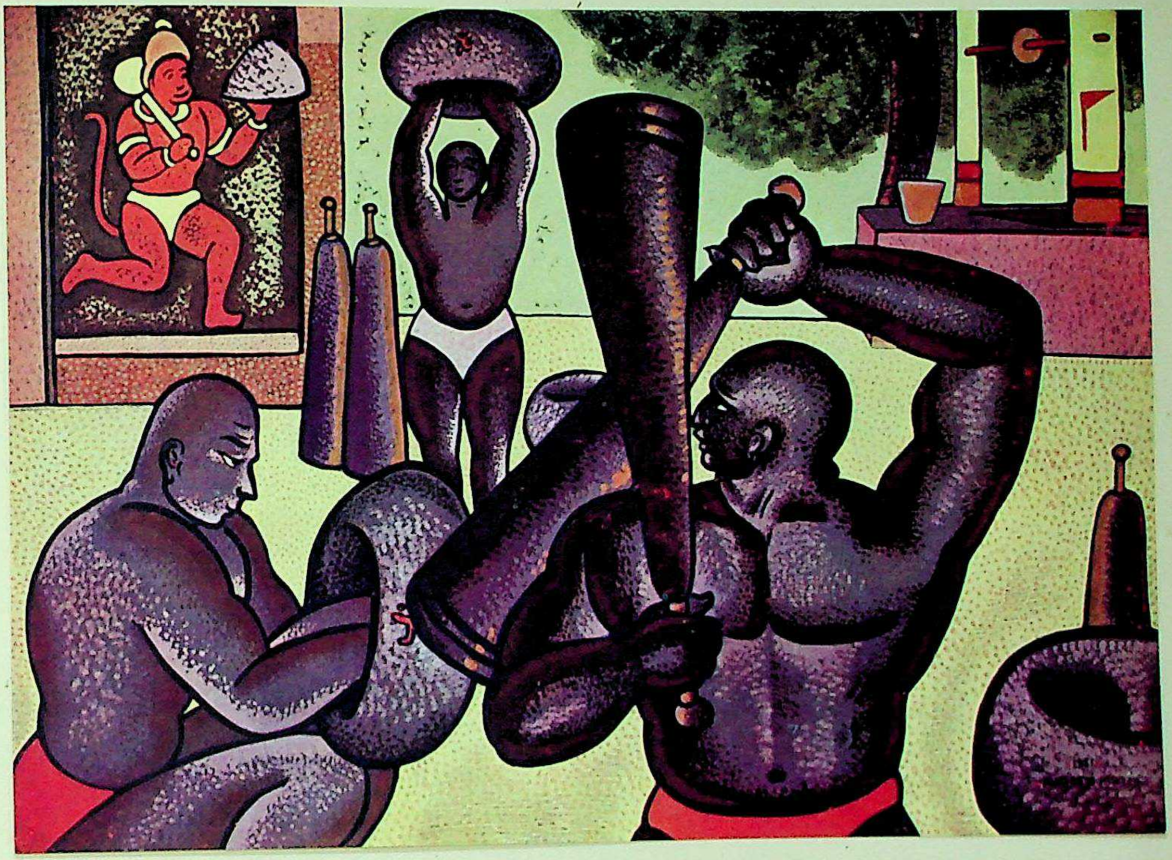
HOME WARDS.

Original Size 20" × 30"



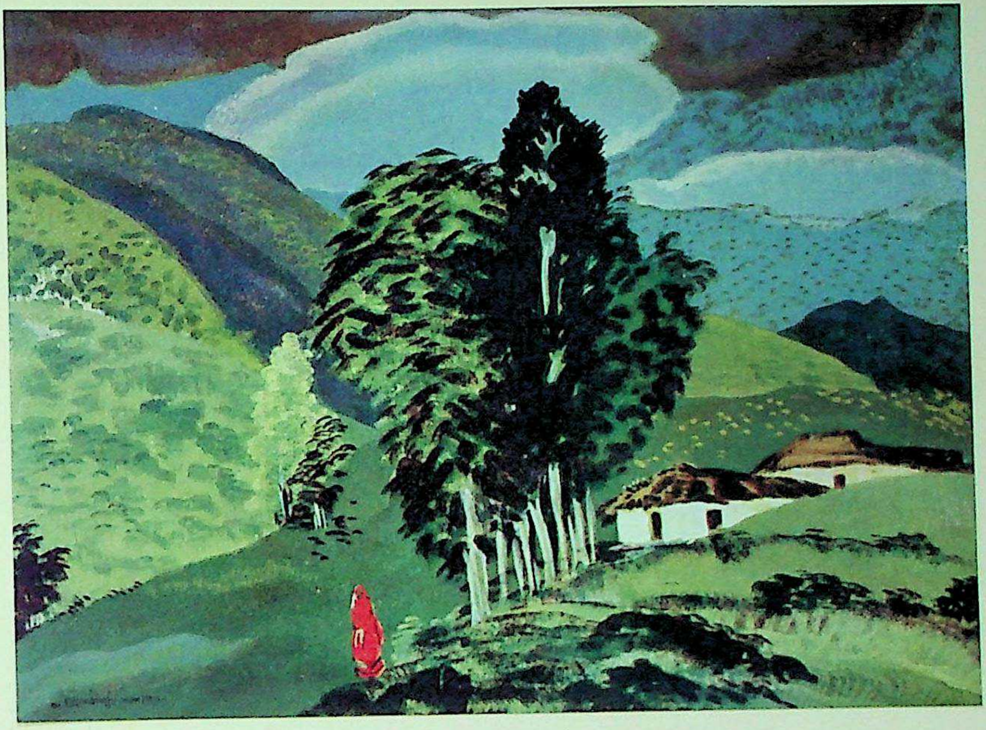
REFUGEE TENTS

Original Size 12" × 15"



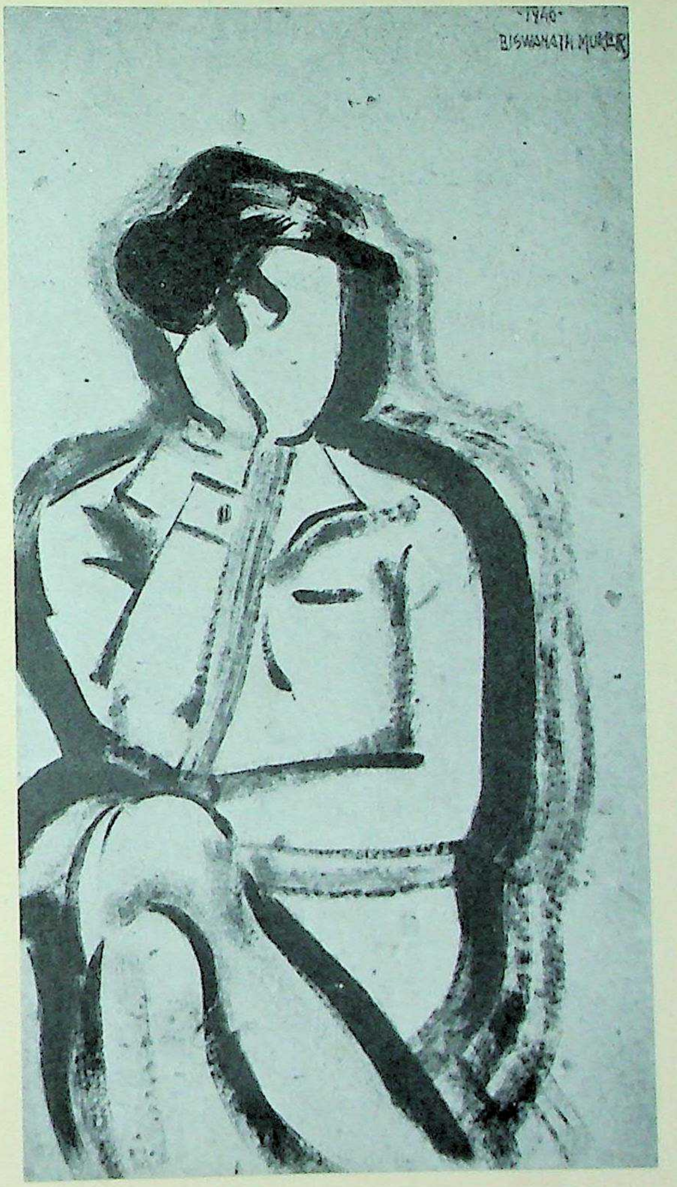
JAI BAJRANG

Original Size 16" × 18"



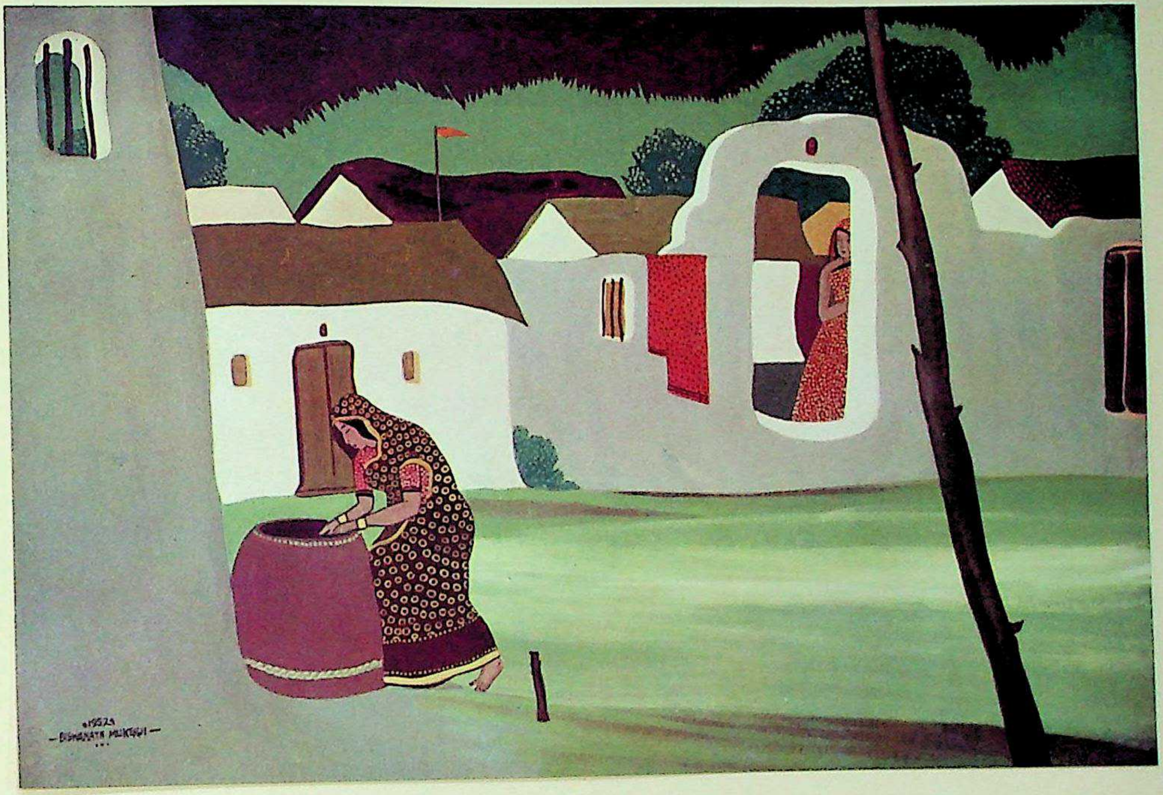
Original Size 15"×16"

AWAY FROM THE TOWN


·1946·
BISWANATH MUKERJI

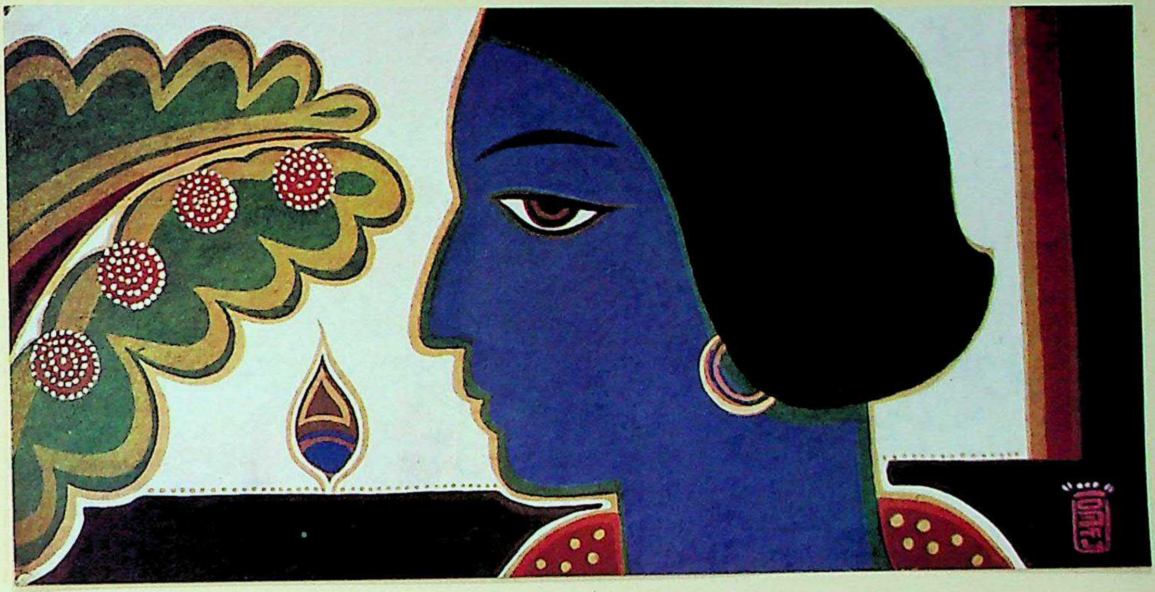
ACTUAL SIZE

PENSIVE.


— BISWANATH MUKERJI —

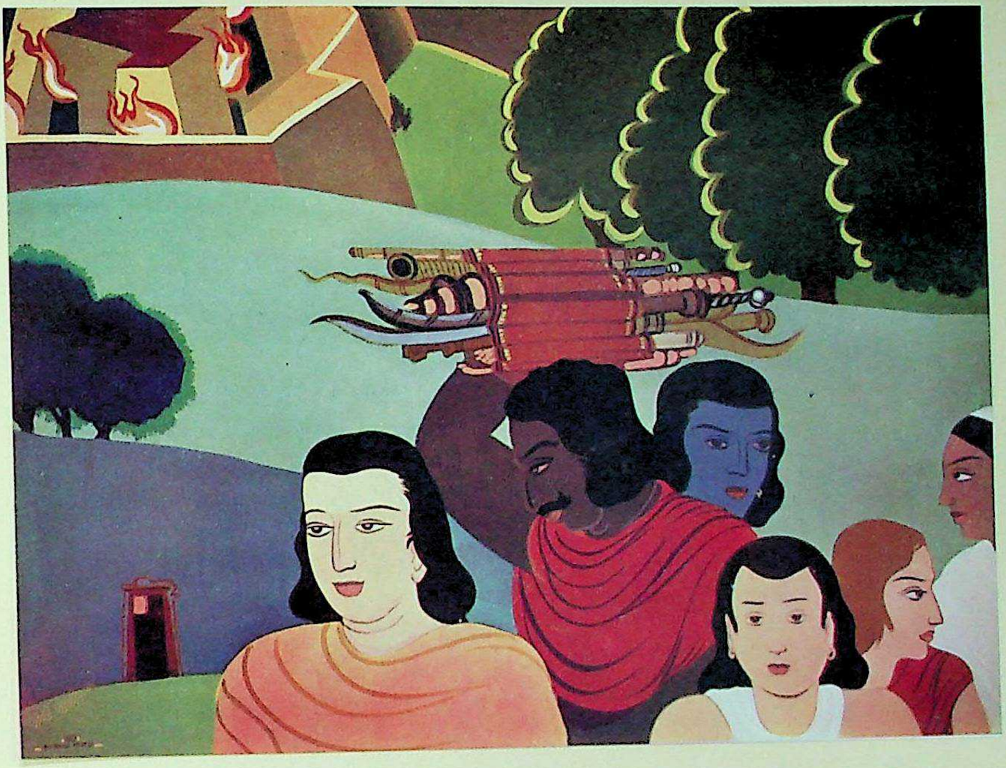
VILLAGE SCENE.

Original Size 16"×20"



BLUE GOD

Original Size 14" × 20"



THE DEPARTURE

Original Size 30"×40"

राजकीय संग्रहालय पुस्तकालय, लखनऊ
विभाग A-1
पुस्तक-पत्र संख्या 121
State Museum Library, Lucknow